Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group

Computer News

Inside This Issue:

The Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group has served novice and experienced computer users since 1983. Through its monthly meetings, newsletters, on-line forum, special interest groups, mentor program and community involvement, it has helped educate people of all ages. The NVPCUG provides opportunities for people to find friends who share common interests and experiences. Through its Computers-to-Schools program, members refurbish used computer equipment for donation to local schools. Since January 2003 the NVPCUG has donated more than 247 computers and 102 printers.

Key Computer Settings Will Be Reviewed at February 16 NVPCUG Meeting

The Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group will meet Wednesday, February 16, 2005, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m., at the Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson Street, Napa, CA.
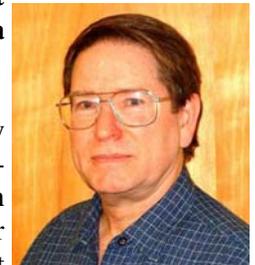
 At our February general meeting, **Orion E. Hill** will review key user-selectable computer hardware and software settings that affect computer operations, performance, and security. Although most of these settings are preset to default values by computer manufacturers, the default settings, in some instances, can result in significant problems. In other instances, selecting other optional settings can make a computer easier to use and greatly enhance a user's experience. Many settings may need to be changed to suit a user's specific needs and provide greater system security. Although this presentation will focus on computers with Microsoft's *Windows XP* operating system, most of the information will also apply to computers with other operating systems.

 Orion is a production and inventory management consultant working primarily in the manufacturing and retail sectors. He is currently serving as NVPCUG President and is the founder and coordinator of our Computers-to-Schools program.

 In the **Computer Tutor** session preceding the main presentation, **Michael Moore** will discuss inserting and formatting clipart and photographs in *Microsoft Word*, including the wrapping of text around these graphic objects. Graphics can enhance the appearance of a document and convey information not easily stated.

 Mike is a Computer Studies instructor at Napa Valley College, where he teaches *Microsoft Word, Excel*, and *Access* courses.   He is also the NVPCUG's Computer Tutor Coordinator.

 Our meeting will begin with **Back-to-Basics**, an informative session about basic computer concepts and skills, and with **Random Access**, an open-floor question-and-answer period during which you can ask questions about specific issues you have encountered in using computer hardware and software and receive helpful information from other meeting attendees.

Need practical information that will enable you to make better use of your computer? Come to this free meeting! Guests are always welcome.

President's Message —
Improving Our Program
by Orion E. Hill

Great Presentations at January Meeting!

   Calvin Ross's very favorable review of *FireFox 1.0*, Mozilla's recently released Internet browser, at our January 19 meeting was very informative – and persuasive. I wouldn't be surprised to learn that many of the 57 meeting attendees downloaded and installed the free browser right after our meeting. **Bernhard Krevet** commented that he had been using preliminary versions of the browser for several months and was very pleased with its performance.

   Mike Moore's Computer Tutor presentation on using the Drawing Toolbar in *Microsoft Word* was also very informative. Like many word processing application users, I had never really taken time to fully explore the powerful tools that are available. I was delighted to learn about their capabilities and to see that they are so easy to use.

   Linda Collison won *ZoneAlarm Pro*, Zone Labs' award winning firewall software, in the members-only door prize drawing.

Membership Renewals

   Congratulations to **Barbara Fraiser** on winning a one-year extension of membership in the early membership renewal drawing at our January 19 meeting.

   I'm very pleased that more than 80 percent (93 of 116) of our members whose previous memberships expired at the end of 2004 renewed their memberships by January 31, 2005. This compares with less than 63 percent (74 of 118) a year ago. In nonprofit organizations, such as the NVPCUG, it is very difficult to measure effectiveness in providing services that satisfy member and community needs. For our organization, membership renewal rates, increases (or decreases) in member totals, and event attendance trends are probably the best indicators of success. A 17 percent increase in renewals certainly indicates greater satisfaction with our group's program.

   If you have not yet renewed your membership, I hope that you will do so now so that you can continue to receive all of the benefits of membership, including free newsletters, mentor support, and eligibility for drawings. Please mail your payment, along with a completed Membership Application/Renewal form. You can use the form in the back of this newsletter or download one from our Web site: *www.nvpcug.org*.

Membership Terms Redefined

   In January our board of directors redefined membership terms as twelve-month periods, rather than as calendar years, returning to the practice in effect from 1985, when dues were first assessed to cover newsletter costs, until the fall of 2002. Whenever people join or rejoin, they will simply pay the appropriate annual fees for their membership categories. Every paid membership will now expire on the last day of the twelfth month from the time payment is received. For example, the expiration date for someone joining or rejoining at our February 16, 2005, general meeting would be February 28, 2006.

   Annual membership fees remain unchanged: Regular, covering one or more members of a single family household, $30, and Student, covering one or more full-time student members of a single family household, $20. The Corporate fee, covering two employees designated as representatives, also remains unchanged at $75. Life and Honorary members pay no dues.

   The board of directors determined that our two-year experiment with calendar-year terms proved to be more disadvantageous than advantageous. The benefits of twelve-month terms include simplified dues payments for new and rejoining members (no pro rata fee schedules), no need for annual membership renewal campaigns, easier database maintenance and member follow-up, being able to detect current membership trends, and being able to more accurately forecast membership and income at any time twelve months into the future, which is essential for planning.

Member Identification Cards

   All currently active and new NVPCUG members will soon receive member identification cards. These cards will be required for participation in a member discount purchasing program now being arranged with several computer-related product vendors and service providers, including CompUSA. Look for regular discounts of up to 20 percent and special discounts for even more.

Volunteers Needed!

   The NVPCUG is an all-volunteer, mutual support organization. Without the contributions of many volunteers, our group could not function. Right now our group is in crisis because we do not have volunteers to handle the duties of three key offices. The resulting workload is too great for our current officers to properly handle. We need volunteers for the following positions, which have been vacant since the beginning of the current administrative term in December.

 Vice President - In the absence of the President, performs

all of the duties of the President, and performs other duties as assigned by the board of directors.

Programs Director - Arranges educational programs for our monthly meetings and chairs the Programs Committee, whose members assist with program activities.

Special Projects Director - Handles a variety of special projects as assigned by the board of directors.

We also need volunteers for a variety of support roles, including assisting our Membership, Programs, and Publicity directors and helping our Facility Arrangements and Greeter coordinators. We need administrators, designers, graphic artists, photographers, planners, researchers, technicians, writers, and members with other skills, including people who can simply help set up our monthly meeting room. Are you one of those members? If so, please contact me to learn more about how you can help.

Presentation Reviews

Volunteers are also needed to write reviews of the presentations at our monthly meetings for publication in our newsletters. While we would be delighted to have one person write all of the reviews, we would also be very pleased to have a different reviewer each month. Writing a review is easy. Just take notes at a meeting, write a short article (200 to 300 words) and e-mail it to our newsletter editor at *Editor@nvpcug.org*. To volunteer, please contact me.

Computer Tune-up Workshops

Should the NVPCUG offer computer tune-up workshops, first for free to members and later for a fee to the general public? That is a question being discussed by our board of directors. The purpose of these workshops would be to help computer owners install new hardware and software, remove viruses and other malware, and adjust settings to improve the operations, performance, and security of their machines. Please let me know what you think and if you would be willing to help at a workshop.

Sound Off!

Got a suggestion for improving an NVPCUG activity? Want to help with an activity? Send e-mail to *OHill@napanet.net* or call (707) 252-0637.

Letter of Appreciation —

On January 19, 2005, the Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group, through our Computers-to-Schools program, donated 36 refurbished Pentium 3 computers with monitors, keyboards, and mice to Napa High School. The following letter was received soon thereafter.

NAPA HIGH SCHOOL

2475 JEFFERSON STREET, NAPA, CALIFORNIA 94558
Phone: 707-253-3711   Fax 707-253-3906
Email: napahigh@nvusd.k12.ca.us

January 26th, 2005

Orion E. Hill
President & Computers-to-Schools Program Coordinator
Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group
361 Pickwick Drive
Napa, CA 94558-6195

Mr. Hill:

On behalf of the faculty and students at Napa High School, we would like to thank you for your donation. We are able to maintain our classroom instruction using technology because of your generous donation. We have suffered because the State has eliminated our technology grant funding for liquidation and replacement. We are not replacing, but patching together what we have. This donation has helped provide students access to technology throughout the campus in classrooms, libraries and computer laboratories. We thank you again for your generosity.

Sincerely,
Richard Perkins
Assistant Principal,
Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Windows Media Player 10

by Chuck Guion, Editor,
Rockport Computer Users' Group,
Inc. *www.rcug.net*

Microsoft has a new *Windows Media Player 10* (WMP10) available now. Go to *www.microsoft.com/windows/ windowsmedia* to download it. It was designed for *Windows XP*. It does not have any help files, but there is an article: "Using Windows Media Player 10 on the web," and you can download it at: *www.microsoft.com/windows/ windowsmedia/mp10/usingplayer.aspx.*

You can use WMP 10 to listen to music on CDs, MP3s, MIDI, Wave, etc. You can play CDs and DVDs (if you have a DVD drive on your computer) with the program. You can also use it to watch your home movies, film clips, etc. You can also use the Internet to find more information about a CD or DVD; i.e. the Album and the Artist. You can quickly Rip from a CD to your computer, as well as use different formats for doing this.

You can also burn your own CDs. Most of the music CDs that you buy have only one or two songs you really like. With WMP 10 you can pick and choose your favorite songs from several CDs and put them on one Master CD. Isn't that great --and it's free!

You can also organize your digital media collection. The program will even tell you where you can buy your favorite albums! All in all, I think it is a great program, and it is free! About the only disadvantage is not having any help file.

The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an international organization of which this group is a member, brings this article to you.

Membership News
by Dianne Prior, NVPCUG Membership Director

Congratulations to **Barbara Frasier** on winning the early membership renewal drawing at our January 19 general meeting. All members whose dues for 2005 were paid up as of December 31, 2004, were entered in a drawing for a one-year membership extension. Barbara has continued her membership since moving to Everett, Washington, in 2003.

The Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group welcomes **Betty Forester** and **Rob Richards**, who joined in January. Barbara is the wife of NVPCUG member **Robert Forester**, and Rob is the husband of NVPCUG member **Dora Richards.** On January 31 the NVPCUG had 95 active members. A year ago our group had 78 active members.

Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group Officers for 2005

Board of Directors

President	Orion E. Hill	252-0637	President@nvpcug.org
Vice President	(Volunteer Needed)		VicePresident@nvpcug.org
Secretary	Julie Jerome	224-6620	Secretary@nvpcug.org
Treasurer	Roy Wagner	253-2721	Treasurer@nvpcug.org
Other Directors:	Dianne Prior, John Simcoe, James Stirling		

Appointed Officers

Computer Recycling Coordinator	Bill Wheadon	224-3901	Recycler@nvpcug.org
Computer Tutor Coordinator	Mike Moore	255-1615	Tutor@nvpcug.org
Computers-to-Schools Program Coordinator	Orion E. Hill	252-0637	CTS@nvpcug.org
Facility Arrangements Coordinator	Steve Siegrist		Facility@nvpcug.org
Greeter Coordinator	Bob Simmerman	259-6113	Greeter@nvpcug.org
Librarian	Marcia Waddell	252-2060	Librarian@nvpcug.org
Membership Director	Dianne Prior	252-1506	Membership@nvpcug.org
Mentor Program Coordinator	Hilton Des Roches	224-6170	Mentors@nvpcug.org
Newsletter Circulator	Jim Hearn	224-2540	
Newsletter Editor	James Stirling	944-1177	Editor@nvpcug.org
Product Review Coord.	Marcia Waddell	252-2060	Reviews@nvpcug.org
Programs Director	(Volunteer Needed)		Programs@nvpcug.org
Publicity Director	John Simcoe	258-8233	Publicity@nvpcug.org
Random Access Moderator	Jerry Brown	254-9607	Questions@nvpcug.org
Special Projects Director	(Volunteer Needed)		Projects@nvpcug.org
Webmaster	Ron Dack		Webmaster@nvpcug.org

NVPCUG February Calendar

February 2	**7:00 p.m.**	**Board of Directors meeting, Piner's Nursing Home, Napa**
February 9	**7:00 p.m.**	**Digital Photography SIG, Piner's Nursing Home, 1800 Pueblo Ave., Napa**
February 15	**5:30-7:30 p.m.**	**Investment SIG, 23 Skipping Rock Way, Napa**
February 16	**7:00-9:00 p.m.**	**General Meeting, Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson St., Napa**
Wednesdays	**9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.**	**Computers-to-Schools work parties. To volunteer contact Orion Hill.**

The Computer Corner—
Protecting Your Computer During the "Flu and Virus" Season

by Joe Shipley, Phoenix PC Users Group NEWS *www.phoenixpcug.org*

With all the viruses and other malware around, I have accumulated a group of software that I consider to be necessary 'protection' for any computer that connects to the Internet.

The software I recommend consists of: ***Ad-Aware***
www.lavasoft.com/
Spybot—Search & Destroy
www.safer-networking.org/en/
mirrors/index.html
CWShredder
www.intermute.com/spysubtract/
shredder_download.html
Zone Alarm
www.zonelabs.com/store/content/
catalog/products/sku_list_za.jsp
AVG Antivirus
free.grisoft.com/freeweb.php/doc/2/
lng/us/tpl/v5
Pop-Up Stopper
www.panicware.com/
product_psfree_download.html

All of these programs are FREE. Millions of people are using them. For Ad-aware alone, there have been more than 90 million downloads just from *Download.com.*

Once these programs are on your system, you need to make sure they are updated. AVG and Zone Alarm have automatic updating; the others need to be updated by clicking a button.

Ad-Aware and *Spybot* specialize in removing spies and malware from your system. They each will remove some bad things the other does not, so I use them both.

When running *Ad-Aware*, first do an update to check for the newest definition files. After updating, run the program. If the program finds items which need to be removed, you'll see a display of the items suggested for removal. If there are no check marks in the boxes to the left of the item name, right-click in the frame and choose the "Select All" option. This will check all the items for you.

Click on "Next" to move the items to a quarantine area. Once quarantined, the items are removed and will refrain from causing you any problems. If you remove something you really need, you can go to the quarantine area and recover the item to have it restored.

Upon installation of *Spybot*, the program will search for updates and give you the opportunity to download them. Do so. Updates are good. After updating, run the Immunizer to make sure you block about 2,000+ bad sites. Once updated, go to "Search & Destroy" to begin searching for more than 24,000 (as of this writing) spies, malware, Trojans and other bad things, which if found, will be removed from your system.

One of the features included with *Spybot* that I recommend is called "Tea Timer." This feature advises you every time a change is proposed for your startup files. Viruses, worms and Trojans will often insert instructions into the startup files. By utilizing Tea Timer, you can determine if a change to these files should be permitted or not. The logic of whether or not to allow a change is simple: if you just installed some software and you're prompted for a change, it's probably OK. But if you're prompted for a change and you did not just install new software, just click No. When in doubt, keep it out. You can always add it in later.

CWShredder can be used to remove a specific group of Web search files that can hijack your browser to take you to certain Web sites and use specific search engines, whether you want to or not. The shredder removes those Web search hijackers.

Zone Alarm is a terrific firewall that advises you of every attempt made by your computer to access the Internet, and of each attempt by the Internet to access your computer. At first it may seem like an annoyance, but once you catch on to the rhythm of how it works, it will greatly reduce the number of unauthorized Internet accesses without your consent. The program runs in the background and gives you the chance to let it learn which Internet sites are acceptable and which aren't. For example, the first time you go to do on-line banking, you may see a message asking you if you want to go to a specific site. If you say "No," you won't be able to reach your bank's Web site. Don't be alarmed. Try your bank again, and when you're prompted to see if you really want to go to the bank's site, then check the box "Remember this site" and click on the "Allow" button. The next time you want to go to the bank's site you'll get right in.

AVG Antivirus is a good antivirus program, self-updating, and it will scan e-mail as well as perform a regular antivirus scan. You can even setup automatic virus checking to have your system scanned when it's convenient for you. With AVG you can, as Ron Popeil says, "Set it and Forget it!"

The last component of my protection package is Panicware's *Popup Stopper*. This handy Popup blocker actually works. And if your bank's Web site uses popups which are being stopped, you can hold down the control key to temporarily disable the stopper to let you receive popups you actually want. You can also open the control center and disable the stopper at any time if the handy control key feature doesn't do the job for you.

So this flu season you can get added protection by using the software described above, and minimize your downtime.

The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups brings this article to you.

Legal Bytes: Cyber Criminals - Who and Why?

by John Brewer, Oklahoma City Computer Club eMonitor,
January 2005, www.ccokc.org

Why do some individuals have the need to engage in cyber crime? I refer specifically to those people who write code that damages networks and the computers connected to those networks.

According to a recent article in *Internet News*: "Tracking virus writers--and more importantly, gathering evidence against them -- is a thorny problem for law enforcement agencies worldwide. While the number of arrests made and sentences handed down make 2004 the best year yet for catching cyber criminals, it won't have a noticeable effect on eliminating virus writers, according to the Finnish security firm F-Secure."

F-Secure states there were three "primary security-related trends in 2004: a massive increase in phishing attacks; the introduction of open-source botnets and for-profit virus writing."

Phishing is the term used for fraudulent e-mails that seek to obtain information from the recipient. This information is used for nefarious purposes, including identity theft. An article on *MSNBC.com* states that consumers are susceptible to phishing. The antispam firm MailFrontier Inc. showed to 1,000 consumers examples of so-called "phishing" e-mail, as well as legitimate e-mail from companies such as eBay and PayPal. About 28 percent of the time, the consumers incorrectly identified the phishing messages as legitimate. Now, that is a frightening statistic, as 28 percent is a high rate.

A botnet is generally a trojan that has penetrated security safeguards and is resident on a computer. When that computer connects to the Internet, the botnet will connect to an IRC channel. Then other infected computers connect to the channel and a botnet is formed. The person who created the botnet, often called a "botmaster" or "botherder," can then control the computers that are connected to the botnet. For example, the botnet could be used to launch a denial-of-service attack on an innocent Web site or computer.

The major viruses in 2004 consisted of *Bagle, MyDoom, Netsky, Sasser, Korgo* and *Sober*. Three of these were designed for specific crimes, according to F-Secure.

The intent of *MyDoom* and *Bagle* and its many variants was to create spam proxies. These viruses caused damages in the millions of dollars and created denial-of-service attacks on *Microsoft.com* and *SCO.com*.

According to F-Secure, at one point *MyDoom.A* was responsible for 10 percent of all e-mail traffic. Both viruses used the *Mitglieder* proxy trojan. Officials at F-Secure suspect the two viruses may have been written by one group of writers. *Bagle.A* downloaded the Trojan from a Web site, and it was installed through a backdoor in *MyDoom.A*-infected machines.

The *Korgo* virus was designed to grab credit card and banking information, according to F-Secure. Similar to the *Sasser* worm, the virus targeted *Windows 2000* and *XP* machines, scanning random IP addresses for PCs with a vulnerable, unpatched Local Security Authority Subsystem Service (LSASS).

Internet News reports it is difficult to trace and apprehend the cyber criminals. "If there's an increase [in arrests and indictments], it's very, very slight," said Paul Bresson, a spokesperson for the FBI, about his agency's efforts to combat virus writers. "We tend to devote our resources depending on the volume and scope of what's out there, and if there's a lot out there, we devote more resources."

The international nature of the Internet means many criminals can leave a long, convoluted trail that crosses national boundaries with ease, even if law enforcement agencies cannot. Despite actions by the Federal Trade Commission to promote cross-border communications and aid, there are still blind spots where virus writers can flourish.

Mikko Hypponen of F-Secure says that whenever he speaks with law enforcement contacts about tracking spammers or virus writers and it leads to places like Romania or Belarussia or Lithuania, "you hear this sigh from the investigators, because they know it became that much harder to gain local cooperation."

"The bad guys know how to reroute their spam and their viruses and their hacking through six, seven, eight different countries and go through places like China and South Korea and some obscure island in the South Pacific just to make it hard for the authorities to track them," Hypponen says.

As an example, he points to a recent case where a Russian factory was hit with a virus by a hacker group operating out of Kuwait. The virus, after gaining access to the machines, started downloading more code from a Web site registered in a small island off the coast of Africa. The actual Web server, however, wasn't there; it was registered through Sweden to Jordan. From Jordan, the infected machines in Russia downloaded code that connected them with an IRC chat system operated in *chat.cnn.com* -- CNN's chat server in the U.S.

Hypponen said it was a relatively easy matter for his company to call CNN and the ISPs in charge of the Web server to blunt the effects of the outbreak, but it's something police would have had a tougher time accomplishing. "If the Russian factory would have called the cops," he said, "how likely would it have been for the Russian police to first of all successfully track the virus around the globe, and how likely is it that they would have been able to prosecute the Kuwaiti offenders?"

Sarah Gordon, a security expert

at Symantec, has engaged in extensive investigation of the personalities of cyber criminals. "All those years of research and contact have revealed that many myths about virus writers are just that. The stereotype that virus writers are all young teenage boys with no social life, hiding in their basement is not accurate," she said. In contrast, she said, most virus creators are typical for their age, are on good terms with friends and family and are often contributors to their local community. "Whatever the reason for writing a virus, all these groups share a common blindspot," says Ms. Gordon, which is that they have no conception that what they are doing can affect the wider world. "They do not connect the impact of what they do on the computer with the impact on another person," she says. "But, once they realize that it can have an impact on other people, they age out of it and stop."

Her research has shown Ms. Gordon that there is a real difference between virus writers and hackers. While virus writers are usually socially adept, many hackers are not. "When you see a complex virus," she says, "it's come out of the hacking community." In her experience many malicious hackers have a borderline criminal view of the world and do not share mainstream ethical norms. "Their judgment processes might be different," she says, "as well as their perception of risk and reward."

In my humble opinion, it is difficult to excuse this sort of behavior, regardless of the reason.

John Brewer practices law in Oklahoma City, is a member of the Governor's and Legislative Task Force for E-Commerce, and enjoys issues relating to eBusiness and cyberspace. Comments and questions are welcome and can be emailed to Johnb@jnbrewer.com.

The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups brings this article to you.

Tech News

Sue Crane, Vice President /Editor, The Big Bear Computer Club, *www.bbcc.org*

The search engine wars get more interesting by the week. Google is partnering with some of the world's most prestigious universities to make it easier for Web users to scan the schools' vast library holdings. The collaboration of Google and research institutions that include Harvard, the University of Michigan, Stanford and the New York Public Library is a major stride in an ambitious Internet effort. The goal is to expand the Web beyond its current valuable body of material and create a digital card catalog and searchable library for the world's books, scholarly papers and special collections.

Meanwhile, Yahoo is adding local traffic information to its maps service, including roadwork and accident reports as well as the approximate speed at which traffic is proceeding along specific roads. The service, part of Yahoo Maps, will offer accident reports and road construction information for about 70 U.S. metropolitan areas. The service will also provide driving speed information for about 22 of those areas. The traffic information is layered on top of a map at the user's request. Icons are used to indicate accidents or construction, while color codes are used for the speed information.

And America Online is testing a Web-based e-mail service that will compete with Yahoo *Mail*, Microsoft's *Hotmail* and Google's *Gmail*. The beta service for America Online's free Web-based e-mail is available to AOL subscribers only. But it will eventually be offered to the public for free.

With a floating screen, Mitsubishi's Scopo, due next year, will truly be a portable computer! This headset with an eye-sized, eye-level LCD creates the illusion that a 10-inch display is in front of the viewer. The Scopo comes with a belt-carried unit with a CPU to process images and video. It can be attached to a cell phone, video player, or other device

Two Japanese companies, Toshiba and Memory-Tech, say they've developed the world's first DVD that can be played on both standard and high-definition DVD players, using the HD-DVD format. HD-DVD has the backing of the DVD Forum.

You can get anything on eBay— except justice. That's what one disgruntled litigant found when she snarkily offered a New York City judge for sale on the popular auction site. Even though the highest bidder offered more than $100, she found out the hard way that crime just doesn't pay. And the judge was not amused.

Residents of 13 western states can check all three of their credit reports for free at *AnnualCreditReport.com*. The Midwest will come onstream on March 1, the South on June 1, and the East on Sept. 1. Previously, you had to buy this information from the three credit reporting companies: TransUnion, Experian and Equifax. The three reports can vary. That's why all three, and not just one, are available. Check your credit report online at: *https://www.annualcreditreport.com/cra/index.isp.*

The California Energy Commission unanimously approved standards to be phased in beginning in 2006 that would require household appliances, including televisions, VCRs, DVD players and cell phone chargers, to run on one to three watts. Even when idle, such appliances now typically gobble up two to 10 watts. Commissioners estimate that compliance with the new guidelines will save commercial and residential power customers more than $3 billion over 15 years.

The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups brings this article to you

Firefox: A program popularized by open source programmers

by Linda Gonse, Editor, Nibbles & Bits, Orange County IBM PC Users' Group *www.orcopug.org*

The latest version of *Firefox*, an open-source program, formerly *Mozilla,* and before that, *Netscape Navigator*, was released to popular acclaim near the end of 2004 from *www.mozilla.com*. Many people, tired of security problems and perpetual patching of Internet Explorer, have begun to make the switch to *Firefox*. I was one of them. It was an easy transition to import my bookmarks, favorites, and other items, and set up housekeeping in it.

But it was a real surprise to find free "themes," a change of appearance for *Firefox*. Feeling the exhilaration of discovery, I downloaded *Nautipolis, Red Cats, Gray Modern*, *Littlefox*, and others; finally settling on *Littlefox*. Then I discovered "extensions." Extensions are little programs, originally called applets, that run from within *Firefox*. Their specialized capabilities add to the functionality of *Firefox* and quickly become features you just can't live without. There are about a dozen I use, including: *Weatherfox, QuickNote, Titlebar Tweaks, SpoofStick, CopyPlainText*, and *Tabbrowser Extensions*.

One extension that makes my online life simpler is called *QuickNote*. It allows me to copy and paste from browser pages into a tabbed notepad available right in the browser. It saves me from opening *Word* or *Notepad* and working back and forth from one of them to the browser window.

Fascinated with the free extensions, I tracked down *QuickNote's* creator, Jed Brown, to ask him to tell me how he got started and why he wrote the program. Also, since *QuickNote* had earned five stars as a popular *Firefox* item, I wondered if Jed thought it might end up being incorporated into Internet Explorer.

He said, "I became involved with Mozilla back in the 90s. I was a frequent user of what was then the *Mosaic* browser when the World Wide Web had just begun. *Netscape* was born from *Mosaic* and I was instantly a user of *Netscape Navigator.*

"Once the 'browser wars' began, I was a devoted *Netscape* user who really loathed how Microsoft used their OS dominance to spread use of their browser. Unfortunately, after *Netscape* released its 4.0 browser, MS was right on their tail and produced an even better and more standards-compliant browser.

"Despite the better browser, I was loyal and stayed on NS as long as I could. Around the time when *Netscape 5* was going to be released (1998 I believe), they decided to open-source their browser. That sparked my interest and I got my hands on the code as quickly as I could. Once the open-source community realized that the NS code was a huge hack and badly organized, they decided to start from scratch and create what was to be the fastest, most compliant browser ever. This was too good to be true.

"Unfortunately, this was no easy endeavor and would take over three years to get even close to a final product. In the meantime, *Internet Explorer* was the superior product (over NS 4.x) and was becoming the browser of choice for many—including myself. I wasn't hacking on any of the code, but I did start testing the releases from the first public beta release. Since that day, I used this new engine and code base as much as I could, but always had lE there for sites that did not work in the new, young and untested engine.

"Once Mozilla had matured (version 0.8) and became usable on a daily basis, I switched over and said goodbye to IE for good. The folks at Netscape had a brilliant idea called XUL that would allow them to write the interface to the browser once, and allow it to run on any platform possible. This meant *Mozilla* looked the same on Windows, Mac, Linux, OS 2, etc. This same technology allowed authors like myself to start creating programs that would live on top of the *Mozill*a platform and extend its functionality (now called 'Extensions').

"As a high-school student back then, I started a project called *QuickNote* that would allow easy access to a notepad-like sidebar for easy note taking.

"While my extension was popular and used amongst many *Mozilla* users, *Mozilla* was plagued with bad interface design decisions from Netscape and AOL, who later bought Netscape, so it really never hit it well with anyone but "geek" users. A few talented programmers at Netscape (Hyatt, Blake, Goodger, etc.) realized this and in their free time started a new project based on *Mozilla*, but much more simple, that was meant to be only a browser instead of a full suite like *Mozilla* was. This eventually turned into what *Firefox* is today.

"Thanks to *Firefox* (formerly *Phoenix* and *Firebird*) much more attention was brought to it and a much larger user base. More interest in *Mozilla,* XUL, and extension development arose. This has led to over 200 extensions made for *Mozilla* applications, and has brought together programmers from around the world, like myself, to join in and help make *Firefox/ Mozilla* better.

"For example, *QuickNote* was a project I was doing by myself in my free time. But now many different users contribute code and translation. A Russian programmer, Nickolay Ponomarev, has joined with me and contributes to *QuickNote* on a regular basis. The whole idea of multi-platform and open source software is amazing, as it has brought thousands of people together under one cause, despite language and cultural barriers. This, in part, is thanks to *Mozilla* and its example that open source software

can be just as good—and in this case, better than, priority software."

We asked Jed what he sees for *Firefox* in the next couple of years.

He said, "I think we will see a continuous trend in the growth of *Firefox* users. Once Microsoft won the browser wars, it dismantled its IE team and left users high and dry. *Firefox* is filling this void, bringing a new and fresh idea to the World Wide Web and making it the place it should have been (virus/popup/spyware free) years ago.

"I also can see more and more companies embracing *Firefox* in their internal networks and products they offer to their users. Google, Amazon and many others are already starting."

We also wondered if *Mozilla/ Firefox* will survive and grow through the efforts of the open-source community. Or will Microsoft gobble up talented program writers such as Jed, and thus keep IE dominant?

"Mozilla/Firefox will definitely survive and be vital for years to come," Jed said. "Microsoft is far behind with *Longhorn,* and even when it ships it will take years to get users to migrate over. In the meantime *Firefox* will continue to see growth in users on multiple platforms and will be extremely important to the survival of Linux as a desktop alternative. Sure, MS will copy features and do its best to find exploits in *Firefox*. No software is perfect, but I believe the very nature of *Mozilla* and *Firefox* appeals to users and gives the Web freedom from control from one sole company. As time goes by, I think the average user will begin to understand this and realize the importance of alternative products and that they are superior in many aspects.

"The other huge benefit that *Firefox* has as a browser and *Mozilla*, in general, as a platform, is their multiplatform nature. As a programmer, I can create any application or extension based on *Mozill*a and easily make it work on every platform that *Mozilla/ Firefox* runs on. This allows users to use any system they like, perhaps Unix/Linux at work, Mac OS on their

Ask The Expert— Bluetooth
by Joe Schmitt, Bits & Bytes Online, Tampa Bay Computer Society
www.tampa-bay.org

What is this "Bluetooth" I keep hearing about, and do I need it?

Whenever something like a mouse or keyboard is connected to your computer, there are protocols and standards in place so that the computer can talk to the keyboard and operate properly. The same scenario also applies to anything that connects to a computer or other electronics around your home. Your TV needs to know how the cable signal is formatted so that you get the sound and video. Bluetooth is a wireless protocol that allows electronics to communicate. Bluetooth goes beyond your computer to integrate electronics across a wide spectrum. It operates on two levels: First, that all Bluetooth devices operate on the same radio frequency and speak the same language, and secondly, that they all share the same procedures in exchanging data and verify that the data is received. That is sort of like being able to speak the language and know the customs so no one misunderstands.

Bluetooth is a standard that has been developed and employed by

———————————————-

laptop and Windows XP at home, and yet feel no difference when it comes to surfing the Web and using the applica - tions/extensions built on *Mozilla*. Microsoft has no real answer to this (although .Net tries) and it is a huge selling point to both users and corporations."

(You can email Jed at *contact_me@jedbrown.net*, and look for programs he has written for *Firefox* at *Mozilla.com*.)

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close to 1,000 different companies. This protocol would allow you to take a cell phone, get into a car with a Bluetooth radio, and transfer the call to the stereo so your hands are left free. Later you could take that same phone and possibly transfer contact information from the phone to a computer. This is just one example. Bluetooth can be found in phones, keyboards, PDA's, and even stereo headphones. It could potentially show up anywhere when you have connected two devices with a wire, but would like to do it wirelessly.

Is this something you need? Just like anything else with computers, the answer depends on whether or not it meets your needs. Do you need a Bluetooth keyboard or mouse? Not if the wires don't bother you. Could you use it to link your FDA or Pocket PC to the computer? Yes, and that might be the most likely scenario that Bluetooth would aid you in. If you are the type of person who likes portable gadgets as much as your computer, Bluetooth may be something to take a serious look into. For more informa-

www.bluetooth.com and *www.bluetooth.org*.

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In Search of "VCR for Radio"

by Frank Bollinger, ORCOPUG

www.orcopug.org

I recently began recording radio programs on my computer. Here's how it happened.

This story began more than 40 years ago, when I became addicted to talk radio. Over the ensuing years, I've enjoyed many hours of entertaining and informative programs. Topic-oriented shows about personal finance, law, cars, and (of course) computers filled the weekends. Hog heaven, until the radio stations rearranged their schedules. When the dust settled, three of my favorites were on simultaneously. On top of that, I'm also a baseball fan, so Dodger and Angel games sometimes presented two more alternatives at the same time. Bummer. Why couldn't there be a VCR for radio?

First Solution

I heard about a special radio and tape recorder from C Crane & Co. The tape recorder runs at 1/4 speed, so you can get a 3-4 hour program on one side of an audio cassette. Two problems were that the recorder is a bit bulky to lug around, and the tapes won't play in typical tape players. So, I also acquired a portable player capable of recognizing the slow speed.

Now I could listen to one program and record another. But there are three programs. One night, I heard about something called RadioYourWay. This is a radio with a built-in timer that saves programs on a memory card. It also has built-in memory. RadioYourWay turns out to be one of those neat ideas that works but is so aggravating to use that you wonder if it is worth it. For example, programming it is clumsier than any VCR you can imagine (I've had many, and mastered them all fairly easily). A couple other quirks added to my frustration. Fast forwarding is exceedingly slow. It takes several minutes to get to the second or third hour of a 3-hour program. Even worse, if you pause playback more than a couple minutes, it resets to the beginning and you have to wait even longer to get to your new starting point.

It was quite a shock to discover how much harder it is to "time shift" radio than TV. But, even with these challenges, at least I could now record two and listen to the third live. Not perfect, but manageable, until the timer broke on the C Crane

recorder. Now, I had to choose which program to miss. Not acceptable after being used to hearing all three.

The Next Solution

My next idea was to find a device like Radio YourWay, but easier to use. An Internet search led to something called "Replay Radio." Since I have Tivo for recording TV, and Replay TV is a competing product, this name was quite intriguing. It turned out to be PC software that claims to work like "Tivo for Internet Radio." I love my Tivo, so I explored further, discovering that it could record programs and had an impressive list (several hundred) of radio shows to choose from. The only apparent drawback was that it recorded MP3 files. Remember, I'm a talk-show junkie, not a music aficionado. So, selecting this approach would mean I'd need something to play back the recordings or be chained to my computer. (At this point, I wasn't sure, but it sounded like I'd need an MP3 player).

Alas, Replay Radio has a serious flaw—it can record only one program at a time (as noted above, I want to do three). An exchange of e-mails confirmed this shortcoming and led me to another program, called *WM Recorder*. Fortunately, its on-line documentation explicitly stated it can do up to eight concurrent recordings. One potential glitch—it doesn't create MP3 files. The same documentation did recommend a program to convert the recordings.

So, I downloaded the software and ordered an Apple iPod (MP3 player) from *Amazon.com*. Since I don't like using earphones, I also ordered a speaker apparatus that the iPod can plug into for playback.

Mission accomplished, right? Not quite. I successfully recorded several radio programs. All played well on my PC. The next step was to convert them to MP3 files. Guess what? The "recommended" conversion program didn't recognize the .asf files created by the recording software. Being the audio "expert" I am, my first question was "What the @#$% is an asf file?" Back to the Internet, where I researched audio file formats and found alternative software. Two allowed trial downloads that were able to handle the asf files. Curiously, after another e-mail exchange, I found out that I could simply

change the asf file extensions to wma and the recommended program would make the conversions. Apparently, asf and wma are two different Microsoft audio formats. Still, it's easier to use a conversion program, since it can batch many at once.

With that problem solved, I'm now able to record several programs on a predetermined schedule. I can use the iPod with earphones when out walking and with my speaker apparatus around my home. I've even used the speaker gadget in my car.

This trip was a roller coaster containing numerous ups and downs with continuing challenges. For example, I found out where one of the originating radio stations is located when Bob Brinker's Money Talk turned out to be a Kansas City Chief's football game. Sometimes the recordings don't work, and one of the programs I want doesn't have an Internet broadcast.

Despite all that, it was a grand adventure, I had a lot of fun doing it, and I am enjoying listening to programs I was missing before. The time from the cassette recorder failure to having all the components assembled and functioning successfully was about two weeks. Oh, yes. What about music? Can't say. I may be the only person who bought an MP3 player NOT to play music.

Here's the final hardware and software configuration:

1. *WM Recorder* (Records the programs) ($29.95 from *www.wmrecorder.com*)

2. *WM VCR* (Schedules the recordings) ($9.95 from *www.wmrecorder.com)*

3. *River Past Audio Converter* (Converts the asf files to MP3) ($29.95 from *www.riverpast.com*)

4. Apple iPod (MP3 Player) (Approximately $230 and up, depending on source and model)

5. Altec Lansing InMotion Portable Audio (Speaker gadget for the iPod) (Approximately $110, from various sources)

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IRS and "Free File Alliance" Again Offer FREE On-line Tax Preparation and Filing, By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Board of Directors

It's that time of year again. Our mailboxes are brimming with W-2's, 1099's, and other ubiquitous indications of our daily financial lives. Preparing our forms 1040, 1040A, and 1040EZ are typically not our favorite annual rite of spring. This year, the fine folks at the IRS and their partners, the "Free File Alliance" are again offering their free on-line federal income tax preparation and electronic filing services. Unlike past years, where only selected groups of people, such as students or military, could utilize the free services, this year there are free services available for almost all federal tax filers.

The main IRS website at *www.irs.gov* has at the top: "Free File - Ever missed a good thing and regretted it? Don't miss Free File. Millions of eligible taxpayers can use Free File — a free on-line service that let's you prepare and file your tax return electronically. It's smart, free and fast. Don't miss it!" According to the IRS, about 6.5 million people took advantage of the opportunity last year.

The process is relatively easy. The first step is to enter the IRS Free File Web site at *www.irs.gov/app/freefile/ jsp/index.jsp?* where you can view the various filing services offered by the Alliance and determine eligibility for each. Eligibility determination for each service is the second step listed. Some of the 15 resources listed have a maximum "AGI" (adjusted gross income) ceiling. Others will only prepare forms 1040A or 1040EZ on-line, while some others will prepare taxes for residents of specific states. Other members of the Alliance will prepare and e-file taxes for free, based on age, often under 25 or over 60, while others (such as H&R Block, TaxAct.com, and TurboTax for the Web) have no restrictions on who can use the free services and are available to all. After the free preparer is selected, the user will be directed to a non-IRS website

to complete the on-line preparation. The taxes are calculated, and proper forms are electronically filed with the IRS, using a secured link. An acknowledgment is automatically generated via e-mail, notifying the filer that the return has been accepted or rejected.

The IRS notes that several of these companies also offer a fee-based on-line preparation service, and the only way to be assured of getting these services for free is to link to them directly from the IRS Free File Web site, and not directly to the company Web sites. It should also be noted that these companies do not generally prepare state income taxes for free, so there may be a charge for preparing the state taxes; but users referred from the IRS site are under no obligation to incur any tax preparation expenses for the preparation and filing of federal income taxes, provided they were originally eligible for the services.

Electronic filing by these free resources, or other similar commercial resources, has several advantages, according to the IRS. Some of these benefits are that it takes less time to prepare on-line than on paper, refunds can be processed much faster, returns are more accurate (provided accurate information is entered), and acknowledgment of receipt is generated so you know the return has been filed; and there are other tangible and intangible benefits. The IRS also has a statement that the software used by the providers for the free service is "comparable" to the software used by these preparers for their commercial (paid) clients.

The IRS is well aware that not all taxpayers have Internet access, so it is arranging for such groups as churches and community associations to provide the Internet access so as to promote the widest possible use of the free service. The IRS is also supporting such volunteer groups as Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) and Tax Coun-

seling for the Elderly (TCE).

Some individuals will justifiably question whether their personal privacy is being compomised when entering this data onto a private company's Web site. The IRS has approved the security and privacy policies of the participating companies, and all of the providers must also have a recognized third-party privacy and security certification. Information provided to these companies can be used only for the preparation of income tax forms, and for no other purposes not explicitly authorized by the user. The IRS will monitor all of the providers for compliance, and the companies are required to promptly alert the IRS if any privacy or security problems are encountered. The IRS has set up an e-mail address with the Free File Alliance at *helpdesk@speedymail.com*, where anyone can get technical assistance about the Free File Web site, or resolve issues with any of the listed providers. Any user who is not satisfied with the selected free provider is free to try another provider that he may qualify for.

The Free File Alliance is a result of the IRS's Restructuring and Reform Act of 1998, which in part has a goal that 80 percent of all returns are to be filed electronically (e-filed) by 2007, and it requires the IRS to make available to taxpayers free on-line filing options.

Last year (2004) saw 6.5 million e-filed returns, and the IRS hopes to triple the number this year. That still leaves many millions more that will have to e-file in order to reach the 2007 goal. The 15 companies listed that are providing free filing services are a good step on the path of meeting the IRS's goals.

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The Wonder of the Current Computer Hardware Transitions

By Timothy Everingham, TUGNET, *www.tugnet.org teveringham@acm.org*

When we have been changing computer hardware standards, frequently it has been one thing at a time. At other times those in authority say that if we are going to change one thing, let's get some other needed changes done too. We are going through much more of the latter right now.

The thing that is more in the forefront of change is the move from PCI and AGP motherboard card slots to PCI Express (PCIe). PCI Express also changes the way data is transferred (serial rather than parallel) and has more intelligent data traffic management. So if you had in mind upgrading to a new processor and motherboard and want to have the latest in card slots, you will have to choose between giving up your present AGP and PCI cards in favor or the newest, or settle for an older style motherboard that will accept them. If you recently paid a lot for a high-end AGP graphics card or have a specialized PCI card where there is no equivalent PCIe card available, that may be a hard choice. You may even decide to buy a new computer. However, there are motherboards now available that have both old- and new-type slots.

On the other hand, you could go to the other extreme by buying a computer with the new Nvidia SLI system. That is a motherboard with two PCIe graphics slots where you can run two Nvidia graphics cards in parallel, to get a 3D graphics performance boost similar to what was done to the old 3dfx *Voodoo 2*. We also started a shift last spring from Sockets 940 and 754 to Socket 939 for AMD 64-bit processors (Socket A remains for 32-bit AMD processors) and from Socket 478 to 775 for Intel Pentium 4 processors, which also limits your upgrade options. Dual-core processors, which have two CPUs on one chip, will be coming out for workstations, servers, and desktops in the second half of this year. Support for dual-core processors will come more from a BIOS change than from a socket change, however. Some motherboards will be able to support dual-core processors by upgrading your flash BIOS, but others will not. We also are making the transition from DDR to DDR2 system RAM, and some motherboards support only DDR2.

Now, though you may think you have had enough, I am nowhere near finished. We now have a new power-supply standard, too. ATX Power Supply 2.01 is in process of replacing ATX Power Supply 1.3. Newer motherboards have different power connectors. The new connector has 24 pins rather than the old one with 20. There have been adapters for the 1.3 power connectors to fit 2.01 compliant motherboards, but now we are going to move to adapters for 2.01 power supplies to fit into 1.3 compliant motherboards. Some motherboards and power supplies had AUX connectors, but the new standard does away with that. One thing that is nice with the new standard is that having SATA drive power connectors is now mandatory rather than optional. Also, power supplies under the new standard are supposed to be more efficient. Nevertheless, be aware that some power-supply manufacturers have been exaggerating the capacity of their product.

However, this new power-supply standard is just a step in another transition, the move from the ATX motherboard and case design standards to BTX design standards. I say standards because there are three different BTX motherboard design formats: BTX, MicroBTX, and Pico BTX. BTX replaces the standard ATX motherboards, with MicroBTX going against the Mini-ATX motherboards and PicoBTX against the ITX motherboards. Part of the reason for the change is to redesign the airflows in the case to get rid of all heat generated by the latest processors. The airflow of BTX designs is from the front of the computer straight through to the back of the computer, rather than the typical lower front intake with exhaust in the upper back. The CPU has been repositioned towards the front of the computer so that it gets the cool air first. That means a redesign of the power supply to the new standard. Also, a thermal module has replaced the standard CPU heat sink and fan. It takes a more global approach in covering the highest heat-producing components sitting on the motherboard, including the CPU. Intel is the one who is pushing this because their Pentium 4s have higher clock speeds than an equivalent AMD Athlon 64 chip, which means they produce higher heat. There is so much heat that Intel had to abandon their goal of producing a 4 GHz Pentium 4 chip. As such, AMD is not in such pressure to move to BTX, so BTX motherboards supporting AMD processors will be a few months behind those supporting Intel processors. The first BTX motherboards just recently came out and should become dominant in 2006.

What does all this mean? By the second half of 2005, if you have a computer that is more than a year old and have thoughts of upgrading it, you will probably do better to get an entirely new computer. This puts into motion another round of the old computer becoming the backup computer and the old backup computer becoming a boat anchor, flowerpot, or, for the more adventurous, Christmas or Chanukah display control system for the whole house and yard. However, because there are so many changes with these transitions, many people will get a new computer sooner than normal, resulting in some of the retiring old backup computers being new enough that nonprofit organizations and schools may want them. As such the probability is that others besides

Make the Start Menu and Taskbar Work Your Way

by Mark Scapicchio, from *Smart Computing, PC Operating Instructions, Feb. 2005, Vol. 16:2*

The Windows XP Start menu and Taskbar are the thoroughfares you take to your computing destinations—your programs, documents, Web sites, and so on. However, those thoroughfares are often forked by default and sometimes even blocked, which can slow you down or take you places you don't want to go.

Almost every user can benefit from customizing the Start menu and Taskbar to eliminate those forks and roadblocks. (Note that the following instructions assume you're not using the Classic Start menu, which allows far less customization.)

Expand The Start Menu

Begin by putting some of the things you need to get to most often (such as recently opened documents, Control Panel applets, and the contents of the My Computer folder), onto the Start menu as expandable submenus so that you can get to them without waiting for Windows to open.

Right-click the Start button, choose Properties, and click Customize on the Start Menu tab. Start by deselecting Open Submenus When I Pause On Them With My Mouse on the Advanced tab, which will keep you from accidentally starting programs as you search for others. In the Start Menu Items box:

Under Control Panel, select Display As A Menu. This will put an expandable Control Panel menu on your Start menu, from which you can choose any of the Control Panel applets. In other words, you don't have to wait for the Control Panel to display to open, say, the Add/Remove Programs Wizard.

Under My Computer, select Display As A Menu. This puts an expandable My Computer menu on your Start menu, from which you can quickly access the contents of any of your hard drives.

Under Network Connections, select Don't Display This Item. You don't need it unless you constantly add or troubleshoot network connections.

Select the Scroll Programs option. With this option selected, a program list too tall for the screen will become scrollable rather than spreading out to the side and covering more of your screen.

Finally, make sure List My Most Recently Opened Documents is checked; this will add a My Recent Documents item to the Start menu, which will expand to display your 15 most recently opened documents. Click OK.

Give Favorite Programs Top Billing

WinXP makes an effort to load the Start menu with programs it thinks you will, or in some cases should, use most. For example, it automatically puts links to your Web browser and e-mail program at the top left of the Start menu but assumes you'll want to use Internet Explorer and Outlook or Outlook Express, even if you have other options installed. Beneath these it automatically adds links to what are supposed to be your most recently and frequently used programs, but sometimes those include links to promo-tional programs that you'd prefer never to use at all.

You can get more control over what appears in the Start menu by limiting what Windows automatically adds and by permanently fixing, or pinning, particular programs to the menu. To limit Windows' automatic selections, right-click the Start button, choose Properties, and click Customize on the General tab. Under Programs, set Number Of Programs On Start Menu to a lower number, such as two (which will eliminate most of Windows' automatic selections but clue you to any programs you may not notice you're using often). While you're here, if you use programs other than IE for browsing and Outlook or Outlook Express for e-mail, specify those programs under Show On Start Menu. Click OK. If the Start menu still contains a link to a program you rarely use, right-click that link and choose Delete or Remove From This List from the shortcut menu.

To pin specific programs to the Start menu, click Start and then All Programs. Find the icon for the program you want to pin to the Start menu and, with the right mouse button, drag it to the left side of the Start menu. A black bar appears to help you position the icon. Release the button. This program is now affixed to your Start menu; repeat the procedure to attach other programs.

Pinning can get to be a habit, and before you know it your Start menu may be overcrowded with program links. You can free up a little more space by switching to small Start menu icons: Right-click Start, choose Properties, click Customize on the General tab, choose Small Icons, and click OK. In general, though, try to pin to the Start menu only those programs you use very, very frequently. If you need to remove a pinned program to make room for another, right-click the program in the Start menu and choose Remove From This List.

those selling computers and computer components will benefit from the chaos caused by this round of the wonder of computer hardware transitions.

Timothy Everingham is CEO of Timothy Everingham Consulting in Azusa, California. He is also a part-time press reporter in the areas of high technology, computers, video, audio, and entertainment/media and has had articles published throughout the United States and Canada plus Australia, England, & Japan. He is a member of TUGNET. Further information can be found at **http://home.earthlink.net/~teveringham.**

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Get There Faster With Quick Launch

You can get to your favorite programs even faster—directly from the Taskbar, instead of having to click the Start button—-if you add them to the Quick Launch toolbar, optional in Taskbar. Add the Quick Launch toolbar to the Taskbar. Right-click any blank area of the Taskbar and choose Toolbars and then Quick Launch. The Quick Launch toolbar should appear just to the right of your Start button. At a minimum, it will display perhaps the most useful Taskbar button of all: the Desktop button, which you can click to instantly minimize all open program windows and display your entire Desktop. It may also include buttons certain programs automatically added when you installed them.

Add buttons for the programs you use most. Click Start and All Programs and navigate to the item that starts one of the programs you use most. Hold down the CTRL key, drag the item to the Quick Launch tool bar, and release the mouse button. An icon appears on the Quick Launch tool bar; click that icon to start the program. Repeat the procedure for every program you want to add to the Quick Launch toolbar.

Why would we tell you how to set up Quick Launch after we told you how to pin programs to the Start menu, and why would you want to use both? One reason is that some people find the Start menu's larger icons and always-visible descriptions more straightforward than Quick Launch's smaller, textless icons. (Note that you can display the name of the program associated with any Quick Launch icon by holding the mouse pointer over the icon for a second or two.)

Another reason is that Quick Launch can be more habit-forming than pinning. You can add 10 or 12 icons to it before you know it and find yourself short of Taskbar real estate for your window buttons. If this happens, consider expanding your Taskbar to a second tier. Place your pointer on the top edge of the Taskbar until a two-headed arrow appears, hold down the mouse button, and drag slightly upward.

Whisk Yourself to Web Sites

You can also add links to favorite or frequently visited Web sites to your Start menu or Taskbar, so you can get to those sites need to use IE to add a link to your Start menu or Taskbar, but you do not need to make IE your default browser to use the link. To add a link to this site to your Quick Launch toolbar, drag the icon in IE's address bar directly to the Quick Launch toolbar and drop it there. To add a link to this

site to your Start menu, drag the icon in IE's address bar first to your Desktop or to your Quick Launch tool bar; then from there to the Start button, hold it over the Start button until the Start menu appears, and then drop it where you've pinned your other programs. Click the link in your Quick Launch toolbar or your Start menu, and your default browser opens directly to the appropriate page.   There's no faster way to surf.

Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group

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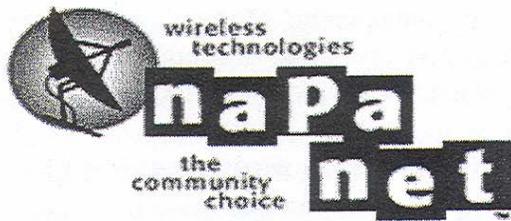 $20.00 **Student Membership**—one or more full-time student members of a single-family household only

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tion on the standard itself and some of the products that use it. check out:

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By Sue Crane, Vice President /Editor, The Big Bear Computer Club, *www.bbcc.org*

At the forefront of Web publishers delivering local news is *iBrattleboro.com*. What's new is that they are relying on local residents. The idea is that citizen-generated content lowers costs and creates more loyal audiences. One intriguing experiment started in May, when the *Bakersfield Californian* launched a community Web site called the Northwest Voice (*www.northwestvoice.com*). The site has no paid writers except for a lone editor. It employs only four people full-time and gets most of its content from readers. Last month, the J-Lab Institute for Interactive Journalism at the University of Maryland announced a $1 million grant program to fund what it calls "microlocal" Web news experiments around the country. Funded by the Knight Foundation, each initial grant will amount to $12,000 and go to nonprofit groups creating community news sites.

Microsoft is setting an example for customers as they introduce a second security measure for their internal networks: smart cards for every employee. By the end of 2005, tens of thousands of telecommuting Microsoft employees will be issued the cards, which will be required to log on to the company's networks.

President Bush signed a new four-year ban on state and federal taxation of Internet connections. The latest version of The Internet Tax Nondiscrimination Act expands the original dial-up definition of access to include DSL, cable modems and wireless Internet connections. The bill blocks states from differentiating for tax purposes between dial-up and broadband hookups.

Intel's products for the digital home and digital office in 2005 will give consumers and IT managers more capabilities than just raw performance, and the company plans to highlight those products. Earlier this year, Intel canceled two single-core desktop and server designs and announced plans to accelerate the development of dual-core processors. Intel is planning to design and market its desktop processors in platforms, similar to the way the company brought the Pentium M processor, a new mobile chipset and new wireless capabilities to customers as part of the Centrino platform. Intel expects to bring 64-bit capabilities to its desktop processors in the first half of 2005 (Microsoft's 64-bit *Windows XP* operating system is scheduled to ship in the first quarter of next year). In 2006, Intel will bring out the

Bridge Creek and *Averill* platforms for the digital home and digital office. These platforms will feature Intel's security and virtualization technologies that it highlighted at recent Intel Developer Forum conferences. Microsoft's next update to the Windows operating system, code-named *Longhorn*, will be required to take advantage of the hardware-based security and virtualization technologies that Intel plans for 2006.

A report from U.S. Pharmacopeia (USP), a nonprofit group that sets standards for the drug industry, says that as more hospitals have implemented automated systems for administering drugs the number of errors associated with them has risen. Kenneth Kizer of the National Quality Forum says: "Technology offers great opportunity to reduce errors, but it's not a panacea. You can't just throw a computerized system in and expect that everything's fixed. It has to be done right. The technology is only as good as the people who use it."

The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups brings this article to you.

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